

James Talarico: The Democrats' preacher

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"And don't believe the hard luck stories of the professional privilege man"—Texas Socialist Party early 1900s primer on political organizing.

In March, James Talarico won the Texas Democratic Party's US Senate primary. In November, he will face off against the state's attorney general, Trump-loving proto-fascist Republican Ken Paxton.

The contest is being closely watched. Several polls predict a win for Talarico. If this happens, it will be the first time in 34 years that a Democrat represented Texas in the Senate. Even if Paxton succeeds, Talarico's rise signals that popular moods in the state, the second most populous in the US, with an economy larger than that of Russia, are shifting sharply against right-wing politics.

This is part of a larger trend. Trump's support is falling among virtually every demographic in the US.

The erosion of MAGA illusions only intensifies the drive of the Democratic Party to try to contain popular anger. In New York City, Colorado, Seattle, and elsewhere, it turns to the DSA and figures like Zohran Mamdani to convince people that the Democrats will do something—anything—to halt the country's descent into dictatorship.

In Texas, the man for the job is James Talarico—a Christ-loving "progressive" who promises to bring about universal improvement, condemns wars in the Middle East, and cuts down the far-right with Jesus' words.

Society's real divide is not by "party, race, gender, and religion," "left vs. right," but "top vs. bottom," preaches Talarico. "We are" bereft of "civility," "morality," and "spirituality." "The world needs Jesus now more than ever." Christian nationalism is a "perversion of the Gospel and a subversion of our American democracy."

His sermon continues: "No more forever wars." "It makes me sick to my stomach to see our foreign policy take the lives of innocent children in Iran and in the Middle East." "What do [people] care more about, pronouns or prices?"

Talarico, it seems from his website, is on a Judeo-Christian mission started 2,000 years ago when "that barefoot rabbi walked into the seat of power and flipped over the tables of injustice." He is "running for the U.S. Senate because billionaire mega-donors and their puppet politicians have taken over our state and our country."

With a Christian humanist pitch as subtle as a flash flood, Talarico plays upon an element of Texas culture—the broad influence of churches—to channel anger over war, social inequality and the collapse of democracy, along with disaffection with identity politics, into the Democratic Party.

Clips of the Senate candidate citing chapter and verse to challenge Texas Republicans' law requiring the display of the Ten Commandments in schools have gone viral. He castigates Republicans as untruthful Christians who do not "love thy neighbor" or keep the Sabbath. He throws in a reference to the rights of atheists.

Talarico's pitch is scripted for the religiously minded who are

disgusted by the far-right's abuse of the Bible. It also plays on the misconception, promoted by the Democratic Party and the left, that the Christian far-right, not the profit-system, is the real problem. With a sigh of relief, everyone can now watch Talarico set the Bible thumpers straight.

Talarico defends the separation of church and state not because it is a democratic principle, but because, based on his reading of scripture, it is Christian. He studiously avoids all reference to democracy as the principle that authority is lodged with the people.

The seminarian's love for his neighbor lasts about as long as his viral video clips. When ICE murdered Lorenzo Salgado Araujo in Houston on July 9, Talarico posted five sentences on X calling for "accountability" and a "full, independent investigation." He has said nothing since.

"Our southern border should be like our front porch," he states. "There should be a giant welcome mat out front, and a lock on the door."

Setting aside the campy language, what Talarico means is that the US should create massive holding pens along the Rio Grande.

On a July 13 campaign stop, he outlined his border plan. He called for more border guards and more police state technology to monitor the border. In an attempt to hide the right-wing character of his policy, he added the demand for more judges to process asylum claims.

He did not defend the right to asylum. He did not condemn the brutality of Texas' detention centers. He did, however, make positive mention of talk show host, Trump supporter and sometime Trump critic Joe Rogan, who in July 2025 hosted an interview with Talarico that concluded with Rogan encouraging him to run for the presidency.

Talarico's condemnations of "forever wars" do not apply to the Ukraine war, which he supports. His criticisms of the Iran war are an allowance extended to him by the Democratic Party leadership for campaign purposes.

In a March interview on CBS Mornings, Talarico issued his standard denunciation of "forever wars." An anchor asked him, "But are the leaders in your party, specifically Chuck Schumer and Hakeem Jeffries, bringing that message home to the Republicans, to the president?" He replied, dishonestly, "I don't know. All I know is what's happening in Texas."

On the Gaza genocide, Talarico questions Benjamin Netanyahu's right to "use forced famine and collective punishment as tactics," but endorses Israel's "right to defend itself" and describes October 7, 2023 absurdly as "the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust." He insists that Hamas be "disarmed" and a "democratic" Palestine created, i.e., led by puppets hand-picked by Washington.

As for Talarico's intention to "fight the power," this is more mythmaking. In 2021 and 2025, when Texas Republicans sought to redraw congressional maps, Talarico and other Democrats fled the state to prevent a vote. He highlights these events on his website.

In 2021, he was the first to return from the quorum break, claiming the point had been made. The gerrymandered maps were passed. In 2025, he was more skillful and managed to give 25 interviews in the first 24 hours of being holed up in a conference center outside Chicago, to which he and other lawmakers had been ferried by private plane.

Equally false is Talarico's narrative of himself as the downtrodden, now risen.

The 37-year-old politician's tale is as follows: His father was an abusive alcoholic, his mother a hotel worker. With a seven-month-old baby in her arms and no roof over her head, she fled. She remarried Mark Talarico, who mowed his lawn, worked in sales and taught his new son how to be right and proper.

In reality, Mark was a nuclear engineer and a regional sales manager for Micrometrics Instrument Corporation, a global leader in the production of scientific instruments. The family lived in Round Rock, Texas, a well-to-do area with a median income far above the national average. After attending the district's highly rated schools, James went to the University of Texas-Austin, the state's flagship institution. He taught for two years, then served as the director of an educational non-profit, and then enrolled in Harvard for his master's degree. Two years later, he won office in Texas' House of Representatives. This is hardly a tale of social oppression.

Talarico references ad nauseam his time as a teacher at a middle school in a high poverty, predominantly Mexican American area of Texas. What is his actual history?

Talarico worked as an educator for two years after college as part of Teach for America (TFA). TFA is, as the *Texas Observer* explains, a "finishing school for future decision-makers in the multilayered technocracy of education policy, one dominated by elites who have historically boosted charter school expansion."

"TFA's mission," it goes on to note, "is to ensure that its members are among that elite. That includes those in the upper echelons of elected office."

Through TFA, Talarico developed connections to Alexander Clark, a force behind the Lone Star Rising Super PAC, which raised over \$6.5 million for Talarico's Senate primary race. Billionaire Stephen Mandel is another major donor.

TFA is a pipeline to the LEE, the non-profit Leadership for Educational Equity network, which coaches former TFA teachers on establishing careers as policymakers and government officials. LEE's Super PAC, backed by Silicon Valley billionaire Arthur Rock, has spent millions on pro-charter causes and is one of Talarico's largest donors, giving him at least \$77,000 since 2018. Talarico has donated to the PAC and, in 2021, voted for a bill granting charter schools property tax exemptions.

According to Transparency USA, Charter Schools Now PAC and Legacy 44, another pro-charter school outfit, have likewise given Talarico thousands.

Charter schools funnel public money not just to private industry, but also to churches. In 2023, the Network for Public Education published a report outlining the religious right's growing presence in the charter school business, which it uses to inject Christian teaching into curriculum.

In short, Talarico's "time as a teacher" was a carefully chosen step on the path to political power, corporate money and right-wing interests hostile to the public school system. The reason he can claim to have "never taken a dime of corporate PAC money" is that his backers funnel money through Super PACs, which are nominally

independent of corporations.

What of his other positions?

Talarico claims to support popular causes. "Health care is a human right," declares his website. He will "save rural hospitals" and "protect Americans from crippling medical debt." He will work to "hire more teachers," "stand up to Big Money and fight private school voucher scams," "secure universal early childhood education and affordable childcare," "prioritize kids' health," and "ensure AI is a benefit, not a harm, in the classroom." Data Centers must pay for their own energy infrastructure. Americans must have paid family leave, secure pensions and retirements, better wages.

Talarico advocates raising the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour. This would result in an annual income, *before* tax and benefit deductions, of merely \$30,000, with two weeks annually of unpaid time off. This is a destitution wage.

Talarico highlights his role pushing through legislation that reduced monthly insulin costs in Texas to \$25 a month. But the 2021 legislation he crafted, SB 827, does not apply to Medicaid holders, the uninsured, or most of those with employer-sponsored health plans—over 80 percent of Texans.

In 2019, Talarico backed HB 3, which reduced the property taxes that wealthy school districts send to poorer ones. It raised per-pupil funding by \$980 and then froze it for five years. The increase has been entirely erased by inflation.

Texas' 2025 education bill increased per-pupil funding by \$55. Talarico criticized the legislation and then voted for it. Today, Texas ranks among the bottom 10 percent of all states in terms of public education funding.

One could go on.

Talarico is a particular American social type, the upper-middle class religious huckster and confidence man. If he appears to be even remotely "left," it is only because his counterparts in Texas politics are so far to the right.

When Talarico speaks of barefoot rabbis "turning over the tables of injustice," he does so as a politician playing for votes. When workers observe, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God," they are expressing class anger filtered through religion. These sentiments have nothing in common.



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